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FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3382

INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 001106

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, STATE FOR EUR/ACE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/01/2019

TAGS: PREL SCUL SOCI TX

SUBJECT: MINISTER OF EDUCATION UNHELPFUL ON STUDENTS EXIT
TO BISHKEK

REF: A. ASHGABAT 1079

¶B. ASHGABAT 1070

¶C. ASHGABAT 1049

¶D. ASHGABAT 0938

Classified By: Charge Richard Miles, reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. On August 31, CDA Richard Miles met with Minister of Education, Gulshat Mammedova, to discuss the ongoing imbroglio with students attempting to study at the American University in Central Asia (AUCA). The Minister was unhelpful and stuck to the now tired excuses of trying to protect the students. When asked to ensure that the students would have no trouble departing to study at the American University in Bulgaria (AUBG), she promised to "review the matter." END SUMMARY.

AS EXPECTED, THE STANDARD LINES

¶2. (C) After many delays, new Minister of Education, Gulshat Mammedova, finally agreed to meet with the Charge to discuss her Ministry's role in forbidding students from traveling to study at AUCA. Mammedova, Ministry of Education (MOE) Head of the International Relations Department, Nury Bayramov, and MFA representative, Ata Eyeberdiyev, attended the meeting from the GOTX side. The Charge, PAO, and PD FSN/Translator attended the meeting from the USG side.

¶3. (C) The Charge started by outlining the various problems the Embassy has faced in trying to send scholarship students to AUCA. He then explained that while the USG does not agree with the decision, we have accepted it and are moving forward with a plan to send the students to AUBG. He continued that while the USG will continue to try and send students to AUCA, we realize, that for this year, this will not be possible.

¶4. (C) Mammedova responded that she personally had met with the students and that the Ministry of Education is "not preventing anyone from studying abroad." She reiterated the reasons she gave parents at an earlier meeting (Reftel); that there was no bilateral agreement with AUCA, that the MOE's action were taken to protect the students as any diplomas from AUCA would not be recognized, and that the MOE is simply "worried about the kids' futures." She mentioned that MOE

had repeatedly made their concerns known to the Embassy about the AUCA scholarship program, but that despite all of their protests, the Embassy continued with the recruitment process.

She finished by saying that the MOE has nothing against students studying abroad, but only in necessary majors and under the support of a bilateral agreement.

NOT QUITE ACCURATE ...

¶ 15. (C) Charge interjected and pointed out that he personally had heard nothing in his ten months in Turkmenistan of any MOE or GOTX objections to the scholarship program or to students studying at AUCA, despite the fact that he had spoken with her predecessor on multiple occasions and also with Deputy Chairman Saparlyev (Education, Health, Science, and Religion) also on several occasions. The Charge also noted that it was "not quite accurate that the MOE had not denied students the right to travel, as several students were pulled off of airplanes precisely because they were intending to study at AUCA." He then continued that the primary focus now should not be on the past, but rather on the future by ensuring that these students are able to continue their education and that the USG hopes the students will be allowed to study at AUBG without any further problems from the MOE.

¶ 16. (C) Mammedova, after consulting with Bayramov, promised to "review the matter of AUBG." (COMMENT: On multiple occasions Bayramov has told students that there would be no problems with studying at AUBG. It appears that they may be backtracking on this promise, as they did not anticipate the USG to arrange these transfers so quickly. END COMMENT.)

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She said that it is her responsibility to "take care of the students" and that includes "looking into their fields of specialization also."

MORE STONEWALLING

¶ 17. (C) Charge continued to raise several areas of MOE-USG cooperation and pending questions including a personal appeal to resolve the matter of registration for the Ashgabat International School. After consultations with Bayramov, Minister Mammedova responded that if matters have been addressed to her Ministry then "of course, we've passed them along and are awaiting answers." She then listed several programs and activities where the MOE is attempting to cooperate with U.S. educational institutions, all without the assistance of the Embassy.

¶ 18. (C) COMMENT: While cordial, the meeting was fruitless. Mammedova appears to be, and wishes to remain, a bystander in many of the ongoing complications of USG education programs in Turkmenistan. She was poorly briefed on issues outside of AUCA, and was unwilling to discuss areas of cooperation. As has been the case often in the past, Bayramov clearly pushed his agenda and the Minister parroted his advice. END COMMENT.

MILES